

**“REAL PARTNERING”  
FORMER LOWRY BOMBING & GUNNERY RANGE  
ARAPAHOE COUNTY, COLORADO**

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**Partnering and Transition**

**INTRODUCTION**

The buzzword of the 90's in industry has been “partnering”. Companies and military organizations, alike, have spent millions of dollars hiring facilitators who bring in all participants of a program/project and teach them how to “partner”. This group then sets out with the best of intentions to hone their interpersonal skills. They develop and analyze each other's goals and expectations; perform team building exercises; enjoy a big group hug at the end of the session; and ultimately, go their separate ways, applying these newly acquired skills with vigor and fervor while drawing handshakes on their viewgraphs and chanting: “Partnering is the key to success!”

The question is: Is this *real* partnering if the buck stops with the last exchanged handshake of the day? How did we manage to have successful projects before we were “taught” what partnering was? Is it possible that there are some basic ideas and concepts common to all successful projects?

The authors of this paper attempt to answer these questions. We will describe how some fundamentals of partnering were applied to a sensitive, highly visible and controversial project to make it successful. We will demonstrate how we utilized tactics such as cooperation and communication (i.e. partnering) to transition the project from a legal liability into a success – one in which all stakeholders can take pride.

**BACKGROUND**

The Former Lowry Bombing and Gunnery Range (FLBGR) (formerly called Buckley Field) was established on 65,547 acres of land acquired from the City and County of Denver in 1937. It opened in 1942 as an Army airfield, was part of the Army Air Forces Western Technical Training Command in World War II, and was utilized to conduct armament and bomber training. From 1942 through 1963 the range was utilized for various training exercises by numerous tenants, i.e. Air Force, Army, Navy and the Air National Guard. Between 1960 and 1980, all of the range was sold or transferred to other parties (non-Federal) in various pieces. The range is now a Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS).

In January of 1998, the Corps of Engineers (Omaha District and Huntsville Center) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) were prepared for a court battle over their differences associated with the investigation and cleanup of FLBGR. In general, CDPHE disagreed with the investigation/characterization methods the Corps utilized at the site and the clearance recommendations published in the draft Engineering Evaluation and Cost Analysis (EE/CA). Both sides spent their time, effort and money trying to convince not only each other they were right, but the public and media as well. Simply stated: it was a fiasco, one that ultimately hurt both sides. Bridges were burned, the public trust was lost and the reputation of both agencies was damaged.

In April of 1998, a Settlement Agreement (SA) was reached between the two parties. Now, a year later, we are telling a real-life partnering success story. The public is commenting on what a strong team CDPHE and the Corps make and how pleased they are with the clean-up efforts at the site. The team (CDPHE, Corps and the Restoration Advisory Board (RAB)) has faced many challenges and successfully worked through them together. Controversy is no longer the status quo. The media has dissipated; the lawyers and judges have been relegated to the back seat. What follows are the details.

#### **Pre-Settlement Agreement (SA) Negotiations**

Prior to the signing of the SA, numerous negotiations, dispute resolution meetings, etc. were held, but to no avail. The parties appeared to agree on general terms and conditions set forth at meetings, but once these meetings adjourned, these same parties went their separate ways and later realized that consensus had never been achieved. The simple solution to this problem: place people in these meetings with the authority to make decisions; insist that every item be outlined in detail; and write the resolution on paper and discuss/re-write/edit until consensus is achieved. This is a painstaking effort - but a necessary one.

During the final SA negotiation meetings for FLBGR, the Corps was represented by a General Officer and CDPHE was represented by their Division Director. These individuals had the authority to make decisions for their respective agencies. They participated in and worked on all facets of the negotiations right down to the editorializing of the SA document. When we left these negotiations, we had a deal. This differs from previous

attempts after which we left with a supposed deal yet still needed to get approval from various levels in the chain of command. Ultimately, the “whisper up the alley” process, so to speak, convoluted the event so much the deal broke itself.

#### **Post Settlement Agreement (SA) Signing.**

The SA included eight major technical points of agreement. Out of these eight, three were of a general nature and five included specific actions to be taken with specific dates for completing those actions. The completion dates for those five items were in the October 1998 time frame. To date, one of these items has been completed and the others are still ongoing. In essence, the Corps has failed miserably in meeting the terms of the SA. The Corps has not been criticized though and CDPHE has not re-initiated legal action against the Corps for failure to meet the terms of the agreement? Why? Real partnering. Due to real partnering the missed milestones were not perceived as non-compliant, but rather as good faith efforts. Because of real partnering all stakeholders were aware that the Corps made every possible effort to meet the milestones. They did not meet the milestones because they could not be met.

Without “real partnering”, we feel strongly that the stakeholders would currently be entrenched deep within the legal system. Without “real partnering” the missed milestones would have been perceived as non-compliant rather than good faith effort. CDPHE would have had little choice but to re-initiate legal action. Valuable time and money would be wasted on lawyers rather than on site, performing clearance actions and enhancing public safety.

#### **“REAL PARTNERING”**

The keys to “real partnering” are discussed in the following paragraphs. We do not claim to be experts in the field of “partnering”. However, we do claim to know how to manage sensitive, high visibility and controversial projects by using common sense and applying the ideas and concepts discussed below.

#### **Stakeholders**

It is important to identify who the stakeholders are in a project. You need to understand why they are a stakeholder and what their needs/goals are. Once this is established you can identify what their role in the project will be. The amount of participation in the project by the stakeholder will correlate with this role; all stakeholders must insist though, on active participation by everybody. In laymen’s terms “get in or get out”. It is to disruptive to a process to have stakeholders participate only when they so desire.

At the FLBGR the major stakeholders include the government (represented by the Corps of Engineers) and the RAB (which includes representatives from state, county, city and

other local agencies as well as citizen members). Each stakeholder participates in the project to a level consistent with his or her role. The “team” demands this of each other and has very little patience with those who chose to participate only when they so desire.

### **Goals**

Once you understand who the stakeholders are, it should be somewhat obvious why they are involved in the project. Once you know why someone is involved in a project, it is easier to ascertain what their goals are. Normally, everyone’s goals are similar, e.g., cleaning up a site in a cost effective, timely manner. Some stakeholders may have different priorities, but their ultimate goals are normally the same. It is important to try to develop mutual goals which address all priorities. Each member of the “partnership” should acknowledge and accept that not all stakeholders share the same priorities and goals. The important point is to strive toward working together to achieve as many goals and priorities as reasonably possible.

### **Ownership**

For a project to be successful the stakeholders must have ownership in the project. Simply stated, ownership means that you take part in the decision making process and are involved in setting priorities for the project. In short, you are as responsible as any other team member for the efforts associated with the project. For the FLBGR project, the Corps and CDPHE are integral team members in the decision making and priority setting process (note: due to the nature of a RAB they are not involved in the day-to-day decision making process, but to every extent possible their input is solicited on all major issues). No decision of any consequence is made without the Corps and CDPHE’s full participation. Who is the ultimate decision-maker? When partnering works, this question is irrelevant.

To demonstrate how this process would work at FLBGR, an example might be as follows: Assume there is a requirement to perform geophysical mapping on the project at a known impact area. Prior to commencing the required field work both the Corps and CDPHE would, in concert, develop the methodology for the investigations; including determining the extent of the area to be mapped, how the mapping would be performed, how the data would be collected, processed and distributed, and in establishing priorities and schedules. During this stage, it is very important that everyone is familiar with the technical aspects of the work. If not, they should be brought up to speed quickly. All team members need to understand the technology being utilized and, most importantly for UXO efforts, technology’s inherent limitations. Each agency participates in fieldwork oversight to the extent required/desired. Once the fieldwork is completed both agencies then work together to interpret the data and determine how it should be present to the public and/or upper management.

An important concept utilized at FLBGR is making data available equally to all team members and shared immediately and throughout the data collection and data processing phases of the project. If this is not done you are asking for problems. You are instilling the perception that you have something to hide.

In the above example - **everyone has ownership**. Everyone is involved in every facet of the project. There is no second-guessing or finger pointing. When things go array – everyone shares responsibility. When things are successful – everyone takes credit. Involving all stakeholders in the details, making them all part of the team and having them participate in the decision making and priority establishing process is essential. If this is not done, it is too easy for non-participants to sit back and second-guess and criticize when things do not go well.

At the FLBGR, when we first briefed upper management that the dates in the SA would not be met, there was no finger pointing and there was no criticism. We presented a joint briefing that in essence said “as a team we did everything possible to meet the dates but due to unforeseen site conditions beyond our control they could not be met”. The feedback was not negative – it was praise. What else could it be. Yes, they could be disappointed. They could even be upset. But what could they say. There was no blame necessary. While these dates were established for specific reasons, they were now arbitrary – they never could be met. This only became obvious at a later date, but that was acceptable. Dates provide milestones that lead you to your ultimate goal. If you work as a team to meet those dates but initially fail, then move on and set more realistic, attainable dates, try to meet those. The key is that you are continuing to work towards your ultimate goal.

#### **Unconditional Open Communication**

While the essence of this topic is discussed in the above paragraphs we feel it is important enough to expand on here. Unconditional open communication means no secrets; everything is on the table. At FLBGR we are constantly talking and listening (communicating). This communication helps avoid misperceptions as everyone has a mutual understanding of what is happening at the site. Nobody holds anything back. There is nothing to hide. As discussed above an important concept utilized at FLBGR is making data available equally to all team members and shared immediately and throughout the data collection and data processing phases of the project. Imagine how much easier it is to manage a project when you don't have to constantly screen information and data, and decide who has a “need to know”. Imagine how nice it is when you don't have to worry about someone taking raw data, unexplained information or data not sufficiently backed up and checked and put a negative spin on it and distribute it to the world. At FLBGR everything is on the table. We all have ownership and we trust each other. Doing something contrary to supporting the project reflects negatively on whoever might attempt to do so.

About a year and a half ago the information transfer/communication at the FLBGR was so poor that CDPHE requested and received a court order to enter a site trailer and obtain project information. *Unconditional Open Communication is much easier* .

### **Negotiation and Compromising**

Negotiation and compromise are common buzz words, especially at partnering sessions: “You must be willing to negotiate and compromise.” True, as long as you consider a few simple philosophies at the same time.

First, you must recognize your partner’s limitations – those you know are beyond his or her control, i.e. government regulations, fiscal law, regulatory statutes, etc. You cannot expect and should not ask for something that is out of their control. This is not a compromise – it is recognition of their limitations.

Second, you need to recognize your partners need’s. What goals and objectives need to be obtained for your partner to be successful? What info, data, exposure, etc. does your partner need to make him successful in the eyes of his management, peers and subordinates? Most of your partner’s positions will be based on these needs. If you do not recognize and/or acknowledge them you will not be able to successfully negotiate items or compromise on them. In most cases, there is room for negotiation and compromise that accommodate the “need’s” of both partners. Be flexible when you can. Be open minded all of the time. In addition, to the extent possible, try to be as detailed as possible when making your agreements. Try to eliminate as much “gray area” as you can. This can save many “headaches” down the road when you discover you both inadvertently did not mutually understand what you agreed upon.

An example of negotiation and compromise might be: Suppose your partner feels an area requires 100% clearance to a four-foot depth. While you agree that a clearance is required you are not convinced that the entire area needs to be cleared and the four-foot depth seems excessive. A good compromise would be to agree to clear part of the area (area of most concern) to a one-foot depth, then meet and discuss the results and mutually decide upon the need and/or extent (size and depth) for additional clearances.

Finally, “fight the battles that need to be fought”. Be aware of the seriousness and of all issues, especially before engaging in battle. Let’s say that your partner wants to do some additional work that has a minimal cost or is small compared to the scope of the project but you do not feel it is required. While you are technically competent and comfortable that it is not required, you must recognize that your partner is also technically competent and has a valid reason (even if you disagree) for proposing to do the work. Therefore, you have to decide if this is a serious issue for you. You need to determine if it is worth the time, cost and effort required to debate the issue and risk impacting the partnership you continue to build. It might be easier to just perform the work and then have bragging rights when you prove to your partner that you were right. Small items can cause big problems if you let them – don’t let them.

There is a time and place though when you need to say no. Some battles should be fought in order to achieve a technically agreeable resolution/compromise. For example, the Corps had a project in Colorado in which CDPHE disagreed with the technical solution presented by the Corps. The cost associated with the CDPHE alternative was in the order of an additional \$15M. That was a battle that needed to be fought. It was fought, and while it was a lengthy battle, an agreeable resolution/compromise was reached and the cost remained the same as originally projected. So fight those important battles and let the smaller ones die a quick and timely death.

### **Personalities**

Personalities are important. If you cannot get along, you have a less chance of being successful. You must recognize your partner's personality and try to accommodate it the best you can. If both partners are working at this you should be able to get along and have a good working relationship. It is much easier to be successful if you have like personalities, but it is not necessarily a prerequisite to being successful. Conflicting personalities can cause many difficulties and foster problem after problem. There is no easy solution to this. You basically have three options.

- One, work at it and make the best of it.
- Two, replace either or both of the parties and hope their replacements get along.
- Three, hope the job gets over quick so you don't have to deal with that person anymore (not recommended).

### **Sense of Humor**

You can have fun while also doing a good job. People tend to do things better and with more enthusiasm if they are enjoying it. Situations are more bearable when surrounded by enthusiasm and an occasional smile. If you have a sense of humor and can show it on a project, you can often develop better, less stressful relationships which ultimately helps you survive the unavoidable crisis common to all projects.

### **Restoration Advisory Boards (RAB)**

While we've described the RAB as an integral part of the team in the above discussions, we feel it is an important enough topic to expand on and discuss why we feel it is important and how we go about making the RAB a part of the team.

It is important to develop and maintaining positive public perception on any project and more so with those of a sensitive nature and which are highly visible and sometimes controversial. Why? Because the project is in their backyard and they have genuine concerns. They are people with families, soccer games to attend and plenty of better things to do then attend RAB meetings. But they attend them for a reason and we must respect that.

The key to making the RAB part of the team is keeping them informed, having open communication and involving them in the decision making and priority setting process. This allows the RAB to develop "ownership" in the project. They become stakeholders in the project. We recognize that the RAB cannot be involved on a day to day basis due to the logistics and the makeup of RAB's, but if they are kept informed, communicated with openly and are part of the process in which decisions are made and priorities are set, they should feel like they are part of the solution, they should feel that they have ownership in the project. There should be no second-guessing or finger pointing from the RAB since they know what is going on and for the most part are involved and part of the process that has dictated the activities at the site.

At FLBGR we attempt to keep the RAB informed by providing monthly fieldwork updates and having RAB meetings monthly or every other month (depending on the need), or when special events dictate a need for one. At these meetings complete briefings are given on what is happening on the project and their input and guidance is solicited. When upper management meetings are scheduled, special RAB meetings are held prior to these meetings so that RAB input can be received and presented to management. Public forums have also been held for the general community to better convey the activities ongoing at the site.

## **SUMMARY**

Every stakeholder is involved in a project for a reason. All stakeholders want the project to be successful. The definition of success may differ between the stakeholders so they must all recognize this and agree to work together to make everyone successful. Once you recognize and understand this you have the framework for a team. The next step is to manage the project with all the things discussed above in mind. Take ownership of the project and insist that all of the stakeholders do the same. Practice "unconditional open communication". Trust your partner. Negotiate and compromise in good faith and with good intentions. Accept your partner's limitations and recognize his needs. Accept your partner's personality and expect him to do the same for you. Keep the community involved, make them an owner. Accomplish your mutual goals through "real partnering" and you will have a successful project.



**“Real Partnering Works”**